

AT THE OTHER END OF THE CHALK DIVIDE:

a survey of sessional
academics in a Regional
Australian University

Background

- **Tertiary casual labour is actually exceeding the Australian industry average by up to 150% (ABS, 2013).**
- **Estimated that > 50% of first year courses taught by sessionals**
- **Australia appears to be following international trends**

“They don't realise how much the School relies on the goodwill of sessionals”.

(Northern Australian University Survey, 2013)

**Association of Industrial Relations Academics of
Australia and New Zealand**

- **Economies of scale have subordinated the needs of staff to those of the massification and commodification of knowledge**
- **A new breed of sessional generalists has emerged, solely to suit the needs of the faculty with no consultation or consideration for individual expectations (Churchman, 2002)**

“I absolutely love teaching. But am leaving the university sector due to dissatisfaction with basic recognition of sessional staff...”

(Northern Australian University survey, 2013)

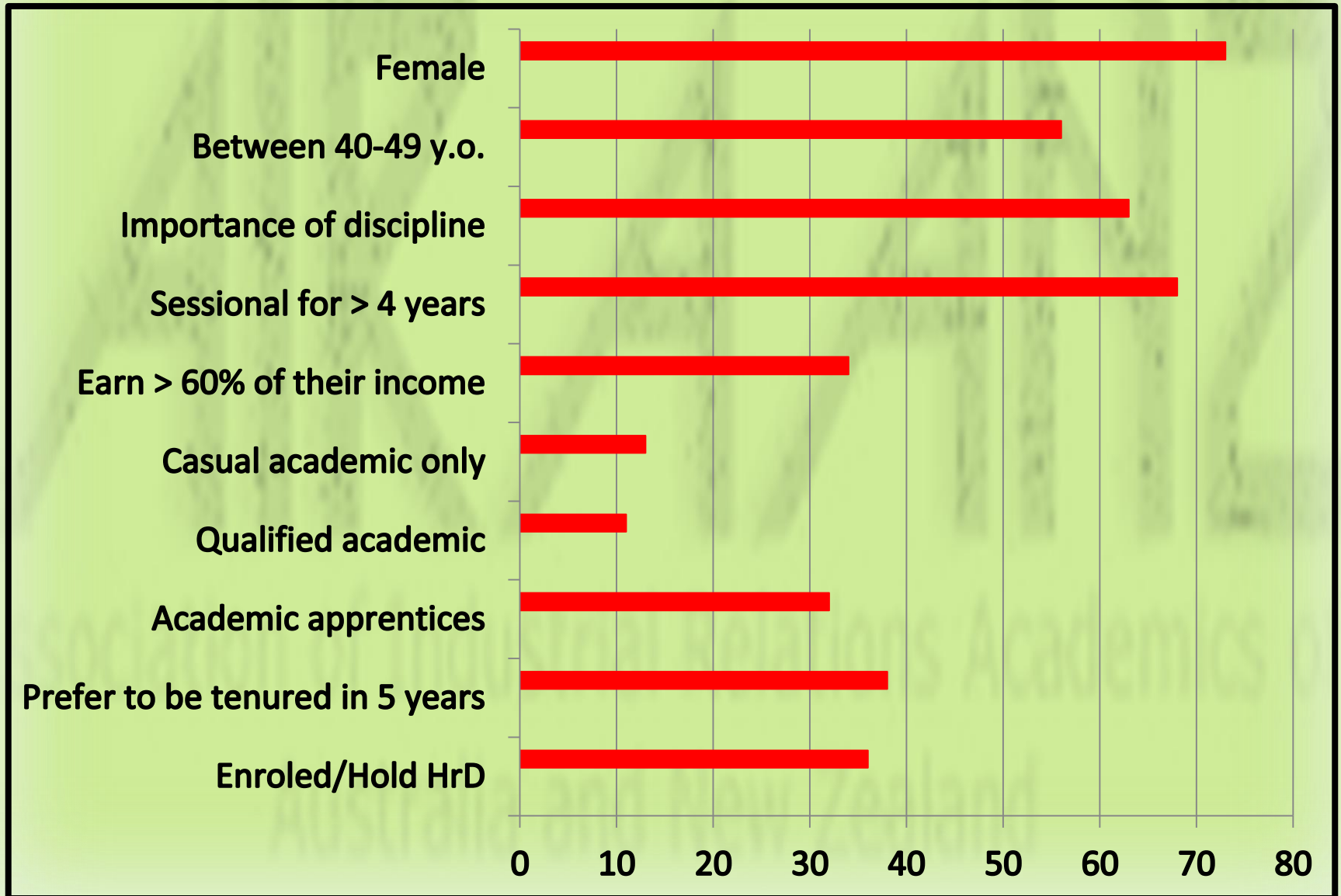
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Survey

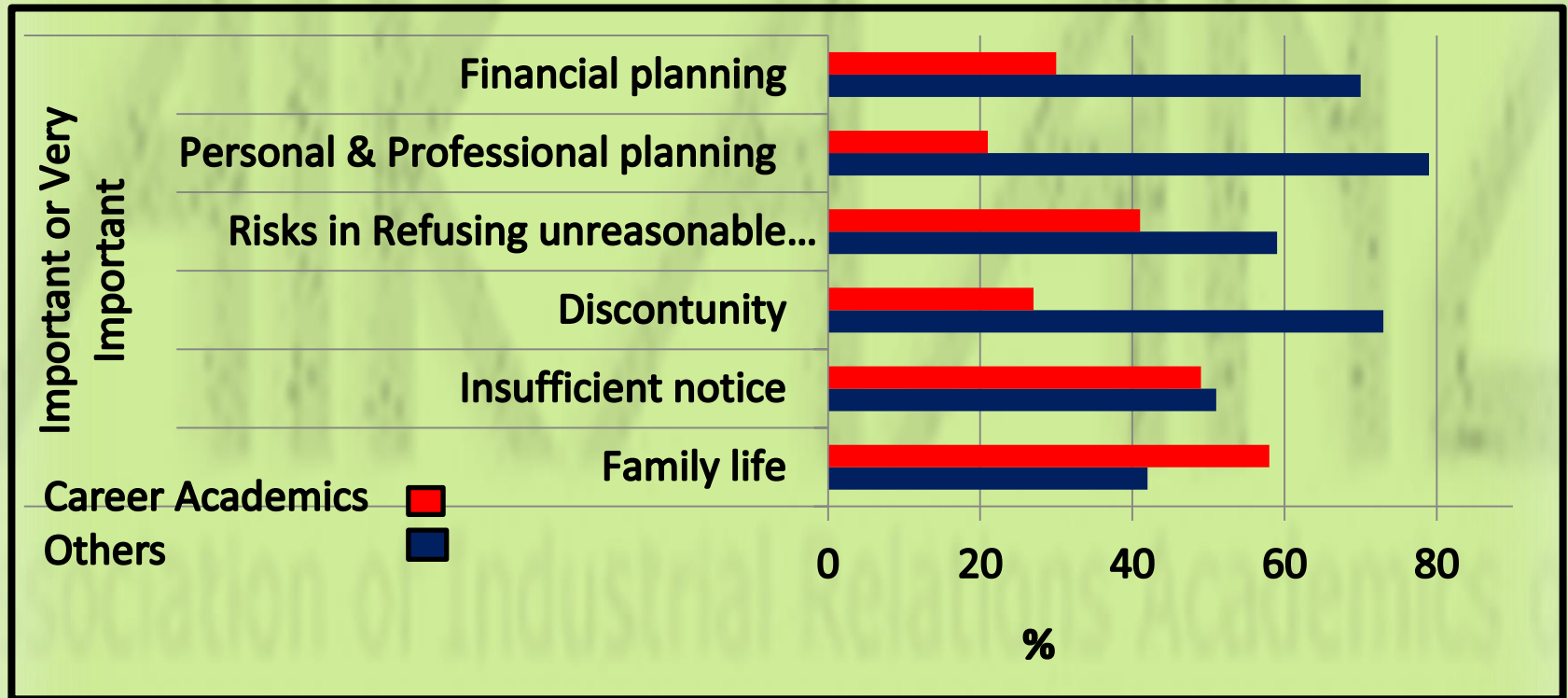
- **NAU's Planning Department confirmed 1,110 sessional teaching positions along with 108 FTE positions were recorded in 2012.**
- **Potential participants were identified as those who had sessional contracts as at 1st January 2013.**
- **Initial invitations sent via NAU's Human Resources Department, N =346**
- **Further inquiries at faculty level, resulted in new invitations being emailed, N = 516.**
- **Ultimately a response rate of 22% n = 113, regarded as a fairly representative sample.**

- **Survey instrument was same as used by Newcastle University.**
- **49 questions across 6 main areas of concerns**
- **Separated Career & Non-Career Academics**
- **Potential participants were identified as those who had sessional contracts as at 1st January 2013.**
- **Available on-line for 13 weeks.**

Respondent Profile



Areas of Concern



Specific Concerns

- **Focus on:**
 - **Remuneration**
 - **Processes & Resources**
 - **Inclusion & Skill Development**
 - **Motivations**

Remuneration

- **Responding to emails, teaching preparation, staff development and research were identified as lacking sufficient remuneration.**
- **64.5% identified dissatisfaction with payment for student consultation, marking, and responding to emails.**
- **Payments do not reflect the actual time spent on above tasks.**

“...since 2001 I have repeatedly had problems with being paid - contracts have not been prepared, tax file numbers not submitted, pay for 1 week full time lecturing has been divided over 20 weeks etc. This factor has been very disappointing and I have considered not taking contracts... simply because of the administrative hassle in getting paid”.

(Northern Australian University survey, 2013)

Processes & Resources

- **Delays in payments and contract registration - primary reasons for dissatisfaction.**
- **Access to training & quality of development.**
- **Career academics and others stated they received none or barely adequate access to training and development 14% and 16% respectively.**

“Difficulties accessing personnel, conflicting advise on contracts, contract not matching requirements, attitudes of some quite rude towards a sessional”.

(Northern Australian University survey, 2013)

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Inclusion & Skill Development

- **Comprehensive dissatisfaction with access to equitable promotion opportunities, with a majority of negative or neutral responses reported from career academics.**
- **47% stated they had never, rarely, or had occasional contact with their supervisor**
- **53% recorded that they often or very frequently had contact.**

“...need mentors, regular training-especially on teaching styles”.

(Northern Australian University survey, 2013)

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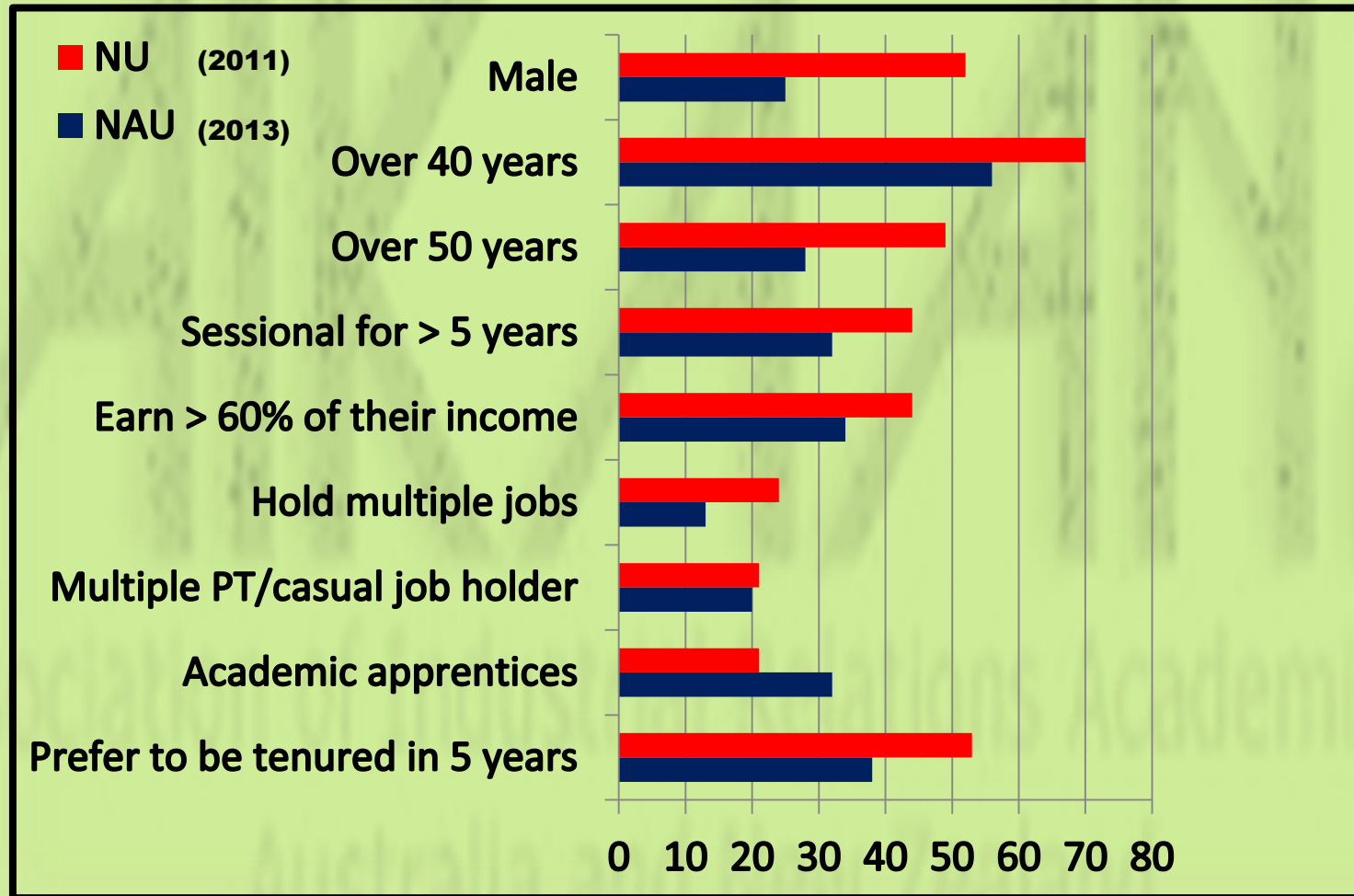
Motivation

- **A high level of responses from non-career academics indicated that satisfaction from teaching was the main motivating factor.**
- **Career academics indicated academic experience as a stronger motivation.**
- **Flexibility of working hours was a motivating factor, only from non-career sessionals.**
- **Work/Life/Balance was depicted as equally important for both categories.**

“It is very disheartening to work for an organisation for 11 years, receive continually excellent feedback from students, and yet have no opportunity to get a permanent position - even if it were part-time”.

(Northern Australian University survey, 2013)

Summary of Comparisons – NU and NAU



Conclusions

- **Northern Queensland Sessionals feel:**
 - **Exploited**
 - **Undervalued**
 - **Remuneration lacking**
 - **Unsure if they will be offered tenure**

“...take *all* of NAU forward, together”

(NAU academic in email to senior management, 2013)

Emerging Issues

- **Heading towards a two tiered approach**
 - **Those who teach**
 - **Those who research and teach**
- **NTEU supporting the creation of teaching only academics.**
- **New EBA's now in place**

Future Considerations...

- **Solidarity? Us & Them?**
- **Union support of two classes?**
- **Changes internal labour market?**
- **Labour Process in Tertiary markets?**
- **PhD as a pathway to academic career?**

Australia and New Zealand

The debate continues...

“Too often in the past EAs have included such clauses but universities have simply ignored them. That’s why casualisation increases inexorably. As a result, many casuals just look upon the NTEU as a bosses’ union, made up of members who themselves use casualisation (e.g. through using research money to buy out their teaching at casual rates) as a way to prevent their own conditions being eroded”.

(George Morgan, 2014)